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***Sanders leads in California's presidential primary, as he consolidates his support among liberals and younger voters. Biden's 15% share puts him "on the bubble" in capturing statewide delegates.***

By Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*  
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Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders is now the outright leader in voter preferences in California's upcoming March 3<sup>rd</sup> Democratic presidential primary. The latest *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed last week finds Sanders to be the choice of 26% of likely voters in the Democratic primary. Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren is second at 20%, followed by former Vice President Joe Biden at 15%. No other Democrat is in double digits.

Attaining the 15% threshold in the California primary is paramount, since the state's delegates to the Democratic National Convention are awarded only to candidates who receive at least 15% of the vote either statewide or within the state's fifty-three congressional district elections.

Support for Warren has been fading since September when a *Berkeley IGS Poll* had her in the lead. Sanders has been the chief beneficiary of Warren's decline, as he now receives 41% backing from strongly liberal voters, up from 31% in September when he was trailing Warren.

The late entry of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg into the race also has the potential to significantly impact Biden in his quest to capture a portion of California's 495 convention delegates, the most of any state. While the latest poll finds support for Bloomberg at just 6%, this is up from 2% two months ago, and most of it is coming from older voters and political moderates, undercutting Biden, who had consistently been the poll leader among these constituencies. Any further expansion in Bloomberg's support could jeopardize Biden's ability to remain at the 15% threshold he'll need to be awarded convention delegates from this state on Super Tuesday.

### **Trend of voter preferences in the Democratic presidential primary**

Voters in California will be confronted with a long list of twenty candidates whose names will appear on the state's Democratic presidential primary ballot. The latest poll presented voters with the complete list of all twenty names and asked those most likely to vote in the Democratic primary whom they would support if the election were being held today. In this setting Sanders is the choice of 26%, followed by Warren at 20%, and Biden at 15%. Pete Buttigieg is backed by 7%, followed by Bloomberg at 6%, Amy Klobuchar, 5%, Andrew Yang, 4%, and Tom Steyer, 2%. Another 3% are supporting other candidates and 12% remain undecided.

Sanders, Warren and Biden have consistently occupied the top tier in candidate preferences in California throughout the campaign. However, the hierarchy of voter preferences has been unusually fluid, with Biden leading in June, Warren ahead in September, and Sanders assuming the lead in late November. The latest poll finds Sanders now in a somewhat stronger position, while support for Warren continues to fade.

There has also been a fair amount of shifting in voter preferences among the lower tier candidates, especially since California's junior U.S. Senator Kamala Harris pulled out of the race in early December. Support for Bloomberg is now on the rise. Klobuchar has also been steadily improved her standing with this state's voters, while fewer are now backing Buttigieg.

**Table 1**  
**Trend of voter preferences in the California Democratic primary for president**  
**(among likely voters in the Democratic primary)**

	<b>January 2020 %</b>	<b>Late Nov. 2019 %</b>	<b>September 2019 %</b>	<b>June 2019 %</b>
Bernie Sanders	26	24	19	17
Elizabeth Warren	20	22	29	18
Joe Biden	15	14	20	22
Pete Buttigieg	7	12	6	10
Michael Bloomberg	6	2	--	--
Amy Klobuchar	5	3	2	1
Andrew Yang	4	3	2	1
Tom Steyer	2	1	*	--
All others	3	10	14	20
Undecided	12	9	8	11

\* less than 1%

*Bloomberg not included in the September poll, and both he and Steyer were not included in the June 2019 poll.*

### **Preferences across major subgroups of the likely Democratic primary electorate**

Sanders' base of voter support in California comes primarily from the state's most liberal voters. According to the poll, he is now the choice of 41% of those describing themselves as very liberal in politics, up from 35% two months ago, and 31% in September.

Yet, Sanders' support is even more striking among the state's younger voters, as he currently receives the backing of 54% of voters under age 30 and 39% of voters age 30-39. The Vermont Senator is also the choice of 38% of the state's rapidly expanding constituency of Latino voters who according to the poll are expected to comprise about a quarter of the Democratic primary electorate.

While Warren also does well among liberal voters, her standing among this group has been declining since September, when she was the poll leader. At that time, Warren was capturing 40% of the preferences of very liberal voters and 32% of those describing themselves as somewhat liberal. Now, her support among these constituencies has fallen to 29% and 23%, respectively, as many have migrated to Sanders. While Warren also continues to do well among the state's female voters and its college graduates here too her support among these groups has been declining since September.

Biden's base of support is derived primarily from older voters and political moderates. Yet, his backing among these constituencies has been declining throughout the campaign. In June, when he was the poll leader, the former Vice President was the choice of over a third of the state's moderates and over a quarter of voters age 50 or older. However, the current poll finds him backed by only about one in five of these voters.

Part of this is due to the fact that older voters and political moderates are also the constituencies where Bloomberg has been making his greatest inroads over the past few months. Should this continue, it puts Biden in jeopardy of falling below the 15% vote threshold he'll need to be awarded delegates from the statewide vote on Super Tuesday.

<b>Table 2</b> <b>Preferences in California's Democratic primary for president across major subgroups</b> <b>(among likely voters in the Democratic primary)</b>									
	<u>Sanders</u>	<u>Warren</u>	<u>Biden</u>	<u>Butti</u>	<u>Bloom-</u>	<u>Klo-</u>	<u>Yang</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Un-</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>gieg</u>	<u>berg</u>	<u>buchar</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>decided</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
<b>Total likely voters</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Party registration</b>									
Democrats	27	21	16	7	5	5	3	5	11
No Party Preference	24	16	12	7	8	5	6	8	14
<b>Political ideology</b>									
Very liberal	41	29	8	4	2	3	2	4	7
Somewhat liberal	20	23	16	11	6	7	4	3	10
Moderate/conservative	19	7	21	7	10	4	6	9	17
<b>Age</b>									
18-29	54	12	4	5	2	*	12	3	8
30-39	39	28	5	6	2	1	5	4	10
40-49	27	28	15	5	6	2	4	3	10
50-64	20	19	18	10	5	5	2	7	14
65 or older	14	16	22	8	10	10	2	5	13
<b>Gender</b>									
Male	32	16	16	8	6	5	5	4	8
Female	22	23	14	7	6	5	3	5	15
<b>Education</b>									
High school grad or less	34	12	17	5	6	3	5	5	13
Some college/trade school	30	16	16	7	6	3	3	6	13
College graduate	24	25	12	7	6	6	6	5	9
Post graduate work	17	26	14	10	7	8	3	3	12
<b>Gender by education</b>									
Female non-college grad	26	18	16	6	7	3	2	6	16
Female college graduate	19	28	12	7	5	8	4	4	13
Male non-college grad	38	12	17	6	5	4	6	4	8
Male college graduate	22	21	14	11	8	6	5	6	7
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>									
White non-Hispanic	21	22	15	9	7	8	3	4	11
Latino	38	13	18	4	3	1	4	5	14
African American	31	18	12	3	2	1	6	17	10
Asian American	24	24	7	11	10	1	12	1	10
<b>Region</b>									
Los Angeles County	30	20	15	5	7	3	4	4	12
South Coast	22	19	16	7	7	6	5	6	12
Other Southern California	26	14	18	12	4	5	3	5	13
Central Valley	25	16	20	7	4	5	4	4	15
San Francisco Bay Area	25	25	11	9	7	6	3	4	10
Other Northern California	30	18	15	3	2	3	6	14	9

\* Less than 1% of 1%

**When making their choices, voters divide over whether to support candidates with the best chance of beating Trump or those who most agree with them on the issues**

Likely voters in the Democratic primary were also asked which was more important to them in deciding whom to support for president in the primary – the candidate with the best chance of defeating President Donald Trump in November or the candidate who most agrees with them on major issues.

The results indicate that the state's Democratic electorate is almost evenly divided on this, with 53% attaching a higher priority to voting for candidates with the best chance of defeating Trump in the fall and 47% favoring candidates who most agrees with them on the issues.

Responses are directly related to whom voters are now choosing to support. For example, large majorities (between 72% and 82%) of voters backing Biden, Bloomberg or Klobuchar place a higher priority on defeating Trump in the general election than supporting one who most agrees with them on the issues. By contrast, only about one in three of voters backing Sanders say this, while 65% place a higher priority on voting for the candidate most in synch with them on the issues. Warren supporters are about evenly split on this question.

There are also differences across other major political and demographic subgroups of the voting population on this question. For example, a 55% majority of primary election voters who are registered Democrats say they are backing candidates with the best chance of winning the fall general election. The reverse is true among voters registered as No Party Preferences who plan to vote in the Democratic primary, with 57% saying they are supporting candidates who most agree with them on the issues.

In addition, by a wide 80% to 20% margin, voters under the age of 30 are intending to back candidates who most agree with them on the issues. This contrasts sharply with the voting preferences of seniors age 65 or older, of whom 72% are supporting candidates who they think have a better chance of winning in November.

There are also significant differences about this relating to a voter's educational attainment. Greater than six in ten (61%) of those who have completed post graduate work in school attach a higher priority on supporting candidates whom they think can defeat Trump in the general election, compared to just 40% among voters who have no more than a high school education.

<b>Table 3</b> <b>Which is more important in deciding whom you will support – the candidate with the best chance of defeating President Trump or the one who most agrees with you on the issues (among likely voters in the Democratic primary)</b>		
	<b>Best chance of defeating Trump</b> <b>%</b>	<b>Most agrees with you on the issues</b> <b>%</b>
<b>Total likely voters</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Voting preferences</b>		
Biden supporters	82	18
Bloomberg supporters	72	28
Klobuchar supporters	73	27
Buttigieg supporters	59	41
Warren supporters	49	51
Sanders supporters	35	65
Yang supporters	30	70
Supporters of other candidates	37	63
Undecided voters	57	43
<b>Party registration</b>		
Democrats	55	45
No Party Preference	43	57
<b>Age</b>		
18-29	20	80
30-39	37	63
40-49	52	48
50-64	55	45
65 or older	72	28
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	48	52
Female	57	43
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
White non-Hispanic	59	41
Latinos	42	58
African American	47	53
Asian American	49	51
<b>Education</b>		
High school graduate or less	40	60
Some college/trade school	55	45
College graduate	55	45
Post graduate work	61	39

**The political ideology of California's Democratic primary electorate and the perceived ideologies of the leading candidates**

The poll also asked likely Democratic primary voters to rate their own political ideology, as well as that of each of the leading Democratic presidential candidates on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing very conservative and 10 very liberal.

The results indicate that voters likely to be participating in the state's Democratic primary are somewhat left of center, with an average (mean) ideological score of 7.2.

These voters rate Sanders as furthest to the political left, giving him an average score of 8.8, followed by Warren at 8.0. By contrast, Biden, Bloomberg and Klobuchar are each seen as being political moderates, receiving average ideological scores of 5.4, 5.2, and 5.7, respectively.

The differences in voter perceptions of the more leftward-leaning Sanders and Warren versus the campaign's more moderate candidates like Biden have been a defining characteristic of the race throughout this year's Democratic presidential primary.

<b>Table 4</b>	
<b>Comparing Democratic primary voters' own political ideology to the political ideologies they attribute to the leading Democratic presidential candidates</b>	
<b><i>(average scores on a 1-10 scale, where 1 = very conservative and 10 = very liberal)</i></b>	
	<b>Total likely voters in the Democratic primary %</b>
<b>Voters own self-described political ideology</b>	<b>7.2</b>
<b><u>Perceived political ideology of the candidates</u></b>	
Bernie Sanders	8.8
Elizabeth Warren	8.0
Joe Biden	5.4
Pete Buttigieg	6.1
Michael Bloomberg	5.2
Amy Klobuchar	5.7
Andrew Yang	6.9



**The relationship between the statewide vote and the ability to capture delegates within the state's 53 congressional districts**

The stakes in capturing California's delegates to the Democratic National Convention are high, since it will be sending 495 delegates to the convention, by far the most of any state. Of these, 416 are pledged delegates awarded to the candidates based on the preferences of primary election voters, while 79 are unpledged superdelegates.

The manner in which California's pledged delegates are awarded to the candidates is rather complex, since they are based not only on the statewide election returns, but also from the returns within each of the state's 53 congressional districts (CDs). In addition, delegates are awarded only to candidates who receive at least 15% of the vote in each jurisdiction. And, because the bulk of whom, about two-thirds, are awarded based on voting returns of the CDs, these allocation rules put a premium on candidates achieving not only a 15% share of the statewide vote, but are able to reach this threshold across a broad range of the state's CDs.

An attempt was made in the current poll to assess the breadth of a candidate's support across the state's CDs. This was done by counting the number of CDs in which the leading candidates are now achieving at least a 15% share of the vote. This is made possible by the *Berkeley IGS Poll's* large sample size of primary voters, nearly 3,000, and because the CD of each voter can be identified from their voting record.

Yet, even with the poll's very large sample, the number of likely Democratic primary voters polled within each CD is relatively small, averaging about 55 voters per district. This means the poll's estimates of voter preferences within each CD is very imprecise. Nevertheless, unless there are large regional differences in voting preferences, which does not appear to be the case in this year's primary, from a statistical standpoint, a candidate like Sanders who receives a 26% share of the statewide vote, would be expected to be in a very strong position to reach the 15% threshold to be awarded delegates in a large majority of CDs. And, according to the poll, this is indeed the case, as he is seen as capturing at least a 15% share of the vote in 48 of the state's 53 CDs. Thus, he is in position to be awarded delegates not only from the statewide vote, but within virtually all of the state's CDs as well.

By comparison, a candidate with a 20% share of the statewide vote, like Warren, would be expected to reach the 15% threshold in somewhat fewer CDs. And, again the poll finds this is indeed the case, as she does so in 38 CDs. On the other hand, a candidate, like Biden who is receiving only a 15% level of statewide vote, is in a much more perilous position. Not only does he need to avoid falling below the 15% threshold in the statewide vote, from a statistical standpoint he would be expected to fall below this threshold in a much larger number of CDs. And, the poll indeed finds this to be the case, as Biden reaches this threshold in just 26 of the state's CDs.

This exercise demonstrates that relatively minor changes in the leading candidates' share of the statewide vote are likely to have a major bearing on their ability to also capture large portions of the delegates awarded at the CD level.

### **About the Survey**

The findings in this report are based on a *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was administered online in English and Spanish January 15-21, 2020 among 6,845 registered voters statewide, 2,895 of whom were considered likely voters in California's Democratic presidential primary.

The survey was administered by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state's registered voters. Once the survey questionnaire and email invitations had been finalized, they were translated into Spanish. Each email invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further email invitations.

Samples of registered voters with email addresses were provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc., derived from information contained on the state's official voter registration rolls. Prior to the distribution of emails, the overall sample was stratified by age and gender in an attempt to obtain a proper balance of survey respondents across major segments of the registered voter population.

To protect the anonymity of survey respondents, voters' email addresses and all other personally identifiable information derived from the original voter listing were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, post-stratification weights were applied to align the sample of registered voters responding to the survey to population characteristics of the state's overall registered voter population. Likely voters were identified based on a voter's interest in and stated intention of voting in the upcoming statewide primary election and factoring in their history of voting in past elections.

The sampling error associated with the results from the survey are difficult to calculate precisely due to the effects of sample stratification and the post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings based on the sample of likely Democratic presidential primary voters are subject to a sampling error of approximately +/-2.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Detailed tabulations reporting the results to each question included in this report can be found at the *Berkeley IGS Poll* website at <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.

### **Question wording**

The following is a list of the candidates whose names will appear on California's March 3 Democratic presidential primary election ballot. If California's Democratic primary for president were being held today, who would be your first choice?

When making your decision about who you will support for the Democratic nomination for president, which is more important to you – choosing the candidate who most agrees with you on major issues or choosing the candidate with the best chance of defeating Donald Trump in November.

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is the most conservative and 10 is the most liberal, how would you describe your own political views? Pick any number 1 through 10 for your answer.

Using the same 1 to 10 scale, where 1 is the most conservative and 10 is the most liberal, how would you describe the political views of each of the following Democratic presidential candidates? Pick any number 1 through 10 for your answers.

#### **About the Institute of Governmental Studies**

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication and public service. A component of the University of California system's flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS's acting co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a complete listing of stories issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll* go to <https://igs.berkeley.edu/igs-poll/berkeley-igs-poll>.